We hope you will enjoy this update about our work with communities living on the Altiplano in Bolivia.

Thanks to your generous support, this year we have been able to start a project to bring running water to 250 people in Palcoma Alta. We are also close to raising £12,000 for the food security project in the village of Botiljaca. Both of these projects featured in last year’s newsletter.

Our colleagues in the United States have funded two water projects this year, so the small team in La Paz is being kept busy. Things do not always go smoothly, of course. You can read about that on p3.

The need for help remains; our new challenge is a project in Topohoco – see p2. More projects are being developed with local communities and there is much work to do.

Around 40% of our funding is from individuals, 30% from Quaker Meetings and the rest from grants from Trusts. Many thanks to you all. All our work on this side of the Atlantic is done by volunteers, so almost all the money we raise goes straight to work in Bolivia.

Please do help us to keep this work going!
170 kilometres south-east from La Paz, the remote Andean village of Topohoco is home to 26 farming families. They grow potatoes, quinoa and beans for sustenance and keep sheep, cattle and llamas. Some of the livestock are sold to provide a small income, others are used for meat, milk and cheese. Each family has on average 65 animals, so the native grassland is over grazed with insufficient fodder being grown.

To make things better, the villagers and QBL have developed a project to increase food security, for which we are now raising funds.

This project will improve 6.5 hectares of pasture lands by replanting hardy native species, especially in areas that have been eroded and lack vegetation, as well as clearing ditches and creating water capture holes to reduce run off. Another 6.5 hectares will be sown with barley to be used as fodder for livestock.

Once grown, the fodder needs to be kept out of the sun to stop it drying into straw. At present there is nowhere for the villagers to do this. So it is planned to build 42 simple structures for use as small fodder stores.

Beside the physical work, the expertise of the community will be enhanced with training in sustainable management of the grasslands and fodder fields, along with improved techniques for the care and health of the livestock.

As in all our projects, a local committee is established to coordinate the work and to look after things when the project work is done. The community will also be helped to set up an association to produce milk and meat ready for sale.

QBL needs to raise about £12,000 to make this project a reality – the local community will contribute their labour and local municipality of Comanche is also providing help. These joint efforts make the funds we raise go further – we do hope you can help us.
The two field workers based at the QBL office in La Paz achieve an amazing amount. In spite of the obstacles they encounter in their day-to-day work.

Projects are usually located in remote places in the high Bolivian Altiplano which involves many hours of travel, sometimes on dirt roads. During the rainy season, journeys can be hazardous with poor roads and flooding from rivers. Snow and hail make travel impossible at times. Indeed, hail is a particular problem on the Altiplano, especially for farmers raising crops. Bolivia is visibly affected by climate change: glaciers have melted, lakes have dried up, and there is recurring drought and flooding. All these impact on the lives of the people with whom QBL works. Sometimes plans have to be rescheduled because of adverse weather conditions and also to fit in with the farming cycle.

The communities who seek to benefit from QBL’s assistance spend a lot of time producing proposals for projects that will meet their needs. Each community is involved in developing all aspects of the project. Although this can be a lengthy process it does have positive spin-offs: community development skills are enhanced and a sense of ownership of the project is nurtured.

Once the proposals and the detailed budgets have been completed, they are submitted to Municipal Authorities in the Province of La Paz and to QBL UK or QBL USA for funding. This is not a speedy process because delays can almost always arise at every stage. For example, if a Municipal Government fails to make a payment to the project before the end of a specific financial year it may be necessary to start the whole funding negotiation process again in the new financial year. Then it is not unusual for costs to have risen by the time funding is eventually agreed, which creates the need to convene yet more meetings of the beneficiaries to amend the original plans.

Negotiations between the community, municipal authorities and QBL staff in Bolivia may involve several meetings both in the community and in the municipality. So even getting started can take a frustratingly long time. Implementing any project is always a fine balancing act. For example, materials nearly always have to be delivered to the community to start a project. This often involves hiring a vehicle, ensuring that someone from the community is available to receive the goods, having skilled personnel e.g. a plumber/pipe layer, a builder/mason, the QBL staff and members of the community ready and available to start the work. The projects require much effort from the communities: digging hundreds of metres of trenches for pipes takes a long time and has to be fitted in with daily tasks. Although communications are improved by mobile phones being available in many communities, getting all parts of the process to fit together is still a challenge.

Even when the project is apparently complete problems can arise. Leaks from water systems have to be checked and fixed, extra visits made, further tests made to ensure everything is as it should be. The fact that projects are successfully completed is a tribute to the persistence and commitment of the communities and the QBL staff team.
Quaker Bolivia Link – A Quaker Future?

This year, QBL was very pleased to have been accepted by Meeting for Sufferings as a Quaker Recognised Body. We have also been thinking about our future and our place within the Society of Friends. We are a small group of concerned Friends and friends from around the British Isles and feel that we need to have some stronger links if we are to keep up the good work. To that end, we are wondering if one or two Meetings might be prepared to adopt QBL as their concern and provide us with some practical, as well as spiritual support. Do get in touch if this sparks your interest.

Quaker Bolivia Link and Data Protection

Like all charities, we have had to work hard to get ready for the new data protection regulations. We contacted everyone on our email list and in the future, we will only contact those who replied to us and said, yes, they would like to continue to receive emails. If you would like to be added to our email list and get the Newsletter that way, please contact us at uk@qbl.org.

Our Privacy statement:

- We will never share your information with any other organisation.
- We will never call you by phone.
- We will only use your information for the purpose for which you provided it to us.

Quaker Bolivia Link – A Quaker Future?

Quaker Bolivia Link grew from the concern of individual Friends to improve the living conditions of some of the poorest people in Latin America: the Aymara of the Altiplano. All our work in Bolivia is done through the locally run Quaker charity, Fundación Quaker Bolivia Link.

If you would like to support our work, please donate through our website www.qbl.org, send a cheque to the address on the left or email for bank details. Gift Aid and Standing Order forms are available.